Chapter Three (BARAK Modified)~~Ba~~

[EB. Here is Ch. 3 modified by EB. EXCEPT for one issue: Lydda !!!(what I learned about it in 62’, and how it is different from ‘new historians’ and Ari Shavit’s reports). I prefer at this stage first to complete my review of Ch.s 4+5.EB.]

I tugged the blanket over my eyes when I heard the three

other cadets stir from their metal cots, pull on their uniform pants and pad off towards the bathroom at the end of the hall. Turning toward the wall, I sneaked a look at my watch: *6:~~00~~30 am*. Another entirely new experience, on only the first of my 180 mornings in officers' school.

Though I was about to turn twenty, I still wasn't shaving, so at least I had the bonus of

a few extra minutes in bed. As I rubbed the sleep from my eyes, I ran through just a few of the items on the curriculum where I knew I'd have to catch up. Basic things, like how each unit in an army battalion – companies, platoons and squadrons – were organized and led. On that, I did have some idea, from– common sense~~cramming for the exam that exempted me from ***kurs makim***~~.

But on a range of more critical issues – *issues* of normal army *battlefield* command practices – I was starting from scratch.

I was older than a lot of the other cadets, from having spent nearly two years in the sayeret. There were some things I'd done that most of the others hadn't. I had trekked from one end of the country to the other. I had participated injoined, and sometimes led,

commando teams exercising~~on~~ **mock raids** ~~into Jordan~~**. I could set and detonate** a variety of authorized and improvised explosive~~a~~ **device**s **which we called a** O.A.S.,Fugas or home made ***bungalo***. They were~~It was~~ **our equivalent of today's IEDs, improvised explosive devices.** One of them~~It~~ **consisted of two sharp pieces of steel, joined at a right angle, with explosives packed inside. We**

placed it at the foot of a stretch of barbed-wire fence, activated the detonator, retreated in a crouched sprint to make sure we didn’t get killed. It would blow a gaping hole in the fence, and clear the way for an attack. Another one was made of to jerrycans full of gasoline and used for ambushing and overwhelming a car. A third one used as a shock grenade without shrapnels

, that could be used in close contact while minimizing self damage to our people.

But almost none of that was relevant to the skills required of a regular squad commander in the army. ~~army~~I'd never been in Course Makim (squad commanders course) which ALL other cadets did and was assumed as something everyone knows– ~~officer~~. **For the first two months, we spent** part ~~almost~~

~~all~~ **of our time** repeating basic knowledge of soldiership combined with a lot of time **in the classroom. Even in areas where I did have knowledge or experience, it wasn't easy. I already knew how to navigate, for instance. I was good at reading maps, and applying what was in them to understanding and operating on a wide variety of terrains. But unlike many of the other cadets, I had never**

learned the textbook definition of all the topographic concepts and terms. Still, it did help that I had always done well in school, at least on the subjects that engaged me, like math and science. I had asked to enter officers' school. I'd pressed to do so. So I arrived highly motivated to learn, and to absorb the information and master the skills that an officer needed to know.

Once we began doing field exercises, I was even more keenly aware of what I still had to learn. Our first exercises wereas on terrain I knew well. It was in the mainly barren hills ~~and woodland~~ to the east of the base, where we had done a lot of our own training in the sayeret. But that typically consisted of deploying two to three-men commando teams in a simulated

assault or an ambush. An "order" would consist of half a dozen three words orders like" enemy on the right, fire~~Ehud, cover me on my left~~"(three words in Hebrew) as we scurried forward.Orders which every one knew will come. And acted even before they were fully uttered. ~~as we scurried forward~~**. Often, there were no orders, no talking, at all. We would have trained for days,**

sometimes weeks, beforehand. We assumed we knew what we were doing. We trusted ourselves, and the others, to judge the situation and simply act or react. And our exercises were always at night.

Now, I was with a squad of ten other cadets operating in broad daylight. As we were making our way up a hill I knew well, we came under “enemy” fire. In those circumstances,

the squad commander was not only expected to give orders. In the heat of battle/exercise, when adrenalin and fear are coursing through even the toughest of soldiers, it was essential that his words were terse, precise and instantly recognizable. There was a set of precise phrases, a syntax, that had to be used. The others in the squad may have been younger than me. But they'd

done *kurs makim*. They had learned the vocabulary. They'd drilled and exercised with it, and in most cases had gone on to command a real squad of soldiers before entering officers' school. For me, it was like a foreign language.

Only several years later did I find out that the course commander was aware I was starting from behind, and that a few friendly words had been

whispered in his ear. The approach came from Aharon Eshel – known as Errol, not(probably-yes) **for his undeniably Errol Flynn-like battlefield demeanor, but from an acronym of his Hebrew name. Tall, with a square jaw,**dark moustache, **a barrel chest and a no-nonsense approach, Errol was a veteran of both Unit 101 and Company A. He** took hold, following~~helped~~ **Meir Har-Zion** and Kapusta, when

they left, to **train us in elementary commando, as well as cross-border exercises.** When I appeared first time in The Unit, he was appalled. “don’t tell me we’re starting training low-teens boys scouts!” he complained to Avraham. But within short time into real training Errol changed his mind and turned proud of his role of shaping me as a commando, from what seemed such a modest

starting point. **Yet, he was before than also on the Trainingsenior staff at the officers' training school. He did not suggest that they go easy on me. They didn't. "I just told them that I *trained* you. That you knew not one thing about the real army. But that they shouldn't worry, because you were a quick learner. I told them I was sure**

that by the end, you'd get there."

There were some familiar faces among the other cadets. In addition to Uri Zakay, out of 150 cadets there were another three cadets from MH my own Kibbutz (including Itai Margalit) and all in all around 25 from "our" (B.G followers) Kibbutzim. All in all well over 100 from Kibbutzim and Moshavim. Socially ,or mentally

we were among our Millieu, the ambitious, eager to do something of value,2nd generation of the Yishuv Pioneers (many times when I think of present time dominance of 2nd generation of the “settlers” of Judea and Samaria , in our Armed forces, one cannot deny certain similarities in the motivational sources of the phenomena)**there was Shai**

Tamari. Although I'd never met him, he was the younger brother of Dovik Tamari,– another well known member of Company A which will later become The Unit commander~~another friend of Avraham Arnan who had been helping train the sayeret~~. And several impressive "Ironim", Shaul Shalev,a fighter-philosopher from Shaked (another Sayeret), Uriel Reichman the idealist ,thinker

and later a leading figure in Israeli academy who came from a well to do family in Ramat Gan. Some of them turned to be good friends later in life. [EB. Your version is better probably.] **A majority of the other cadets were kibbutzniks, and some were from ~~near~~ Mishmar Hasharon. One of them, Itai Margulies, was a childhood friend: the oldest son of my mother's Gordonia suitor,**

Ya’akov Margulies. Yet except for mealtimes, I rarely saw any of them. The school was structured like a military unit. We formed a single company, but we were divided into six platoons of a few dozen men each. None of the other cadets I knew was in my platoon. It wasn’t until the larger-scale field exercises in the final six week ~~months~~s of the course, when platoons were

sometimes combined, that we sometimes found ourselves working together.

There was inevitably an underlying sense of competition.—We were young and ambitious. Myself ,probably more than many others~~Everyone wanted to do well and, ultimately, to be among the half-dozen cadets singled out for special commendation at the end~~. **Yet there was no**

backstabbing. We co-operated. This kind of teamwork came naturally to kids raised on the kibbutz. There was also an element of self-interest(?) in it. Every test that we took, every paper we wrote, and every field exercise, was individually marked by our instructors. But for our final evaluation, in order to emphasize the importance of teamwork in any successful

military operation, each of us would be asked to give a mark on his fellow cadets as well.

At this stage, five months into the course, ~~Though~~ I've got acquainted with what was expected from a cadet ,I was always good outside, but even **my classroom work got steadily better –** ~~– trending up from my early stream of Cs, to Bs and finally As by the final month or so – even there was the~~

occasional setback. Near the end of the course, we started to discuss night raids ,which were supposed to be a non standard and complicate military activity. After some theoretical and historic case studies, We had an individual ~~we had an intensive period of classroom instruction on~~ **planning** exercise, where each cadet has to plan his own version of **a raid**, all **against**

the samean **enemy target**.. ~~We were then told to design an attack of our own.~~ **I knew by now what the expected**/conventional wisdom **answer was: a straight-on assault by a core force of our** companyplatoon**, with smaller units providing cover and suppressing fire from the enemy soldiers guarding the facility.** We got an air photograph and some written material of the

target. The ~~But the~~ **particular target we were assigned was** ~~familiar. It was the same one we had used for our very first planning exercise in Sayeret Matkal:~~ **the Jordanian air**force base~~port~~ **in Qalandia near Jerusalem. Since raids like this one were precisely what the sayeret** chose to train~~had been set~~ **up for,** and I had a lot of personal experience in mock night raids on our air force

bases, **I submitted a p**lan~~aper~~ **based on how we, not the regular army, would mount** such a raid~~an attack~~**.**

My plan began with the assumption that we could give three quarters~~half~~ **of the** company~~platoon~~ **the night off. The aim of the** plan~~exercise~~**, after all, wasn’t to engage enemy troops. It was to get into the air**base~~port~~ **and blow up the aircraft. We would need**

only a dozen troops for that. We would analyze~~scout~~ **the perimeter for the most vulnerable part of the wire fence, ensure it wasn’t booby-trapped, and cut an opening just wide enough to crawl through**, close it carefully that a passing patrol wont recognize anything happened. **Then, bypassing the guards** ~~at the front of the air base~~**, we would sneak up on the planes**

from the far side, place explosives with a 10-minute time-delay inside the landing gear cavities of some ten airplanes along the only tarmac parking lane ~~on the wheel assemblies~~**; retrace our steps; fold back the opening in the fence. And leave, without anyone knowing we'd been there**, till the explosions occur**.**

I was rewarded with my first D, the lowest mark the

instructors could give me without failing me outright. Still, the rebuff was a lot less up damaging now~~setting to me~~ **than if it had come near the beginning of the course.** ~~Back then, moreover, I doubt I would have dared submit such a paper. My focus had been simply on catching up with the basics of regular army organization, training and tactics~~**. Now, I was** quiet **confident that I had**

made the right plan, although not in line with the standard way the Officers School had seen it.~~up the lost ground.~~

We were at the final few weeks of the course, personal soldiership, squad command exercises as well as platoon command exercises were all behind us. Al most all cadets had already got their turn/opportunity to take a platoon commander role in one

of the many exercises we ran in the field. I did not. Along most of those months I assumed the instructors, lead in my case by Moshe Yosef, A solid respected Major from the parachutists knew that I don’t have even the basic background to take it. Later it became for me a riddle. Why don’t they give me a command role in an exercise? I was very often chosen, especially at night

time exercises, by whoever got the command role to be his personal platoon messenger, to walk besides him and be ready to run around and make sure his orders are understood and executed properly.I assumed it had to do with the fact that usually the Cadet in command had very little time to organize for the exercise: plan, prepare the force, brief it, make sure all munitions and

equipment are in place, and make sure he learned the map good enough that he will reach “his” objective, not another barn hill or falling into an “ambush” or stepping into “minefield”. I knew the area well and was, then, fast on learning maps, so with me at his side, the cadet felt assured we at least wont get lost. This repeated choice did not get un noticed by our

instructors .It also gave me an opportunity to learn at close distance from both successes as well as mistakes of my fellow cadets. We've entered, now, the final Chapter were the subject turned into the way a group of platoons each of them commanded by a cadet, in the role of an officer, altogether, a Company level force, has to act in harmony for a common objective. A company is usually

commanded by a Captain or a senior lieutenant ~~To my relief, a week later, the instructors also gave me a vote of confidence. For months, in our field exercises, different cadets had been taking turns in assuming command. Though I got a range of other operational roles, I was the only one in our platoon who had been left out of the commanders' rota. I understood why. I still wasn't~~

~~seen as quite up to the level of knowledge and experience of the others.~~ **But now, for our last and largest** exercise, a raid exercise~~m~~**~~ock attack~~,** **involving the whole training company, I was put in command.**

The whole operation, from planning and briefing to execution, took two days. The aim was to “attack, conquer” and “destroy”~~“secure”~~ **an** Enemy headquarter position, which

happened to be an **impressive beige-stone building in the middle of a pine(?) forest, where the central plain of Israel rose to the east towards Jerusalem. It was on the edge of a kibbutz called Hulda, the site of an earlier Jewish farming settlement which was attacked and destroyed by local Arabs** in 1929, **twenty years before the birth of the state of Israel. The kibbutz was**

founded two years later, in 1931. It lived without incident, in fact in harmony, with the Arab village of Hulda until the 1948 war, when it played a key role as a launching pad for~~in organizing~~ **convoys to break the Arab siege of Jerusalem. After an attack**(date?) **on one of the convoys which left 22 people dead, Ben-Gurion ordered** Hagana units (**Jewish settlements**) **to**

take over Arab villages on the road up to Jerusalem. [EB. I think we've already described Tochnit Dalet.] **The** Hagana unit~~kibbutzniks~~ **overran the village of Hulda, and the villagers fled east into** (? Ramallah) **Transjordan.**

I was aware of this history, even as a 12~~0~~**-year-old,** our art and painting teacher was the niece of Ephraim Chizik who fell in Hulda in 29'. And **in**

~~large~~ part because the kibbutz of Hulda was Gordonia's first in Palestine, set up a couple (?)of years before Mishmar Hasharon. And while there was no discussion of the historic context during ~~our~~ our instructors' initial briefing for the Hulda night raid~~exercise~~, we had dealt not only with Arab flight, but a forced Arab expulsion, in a daylong visit a week earlier to

a town eight miles north of there. Lod, near Israel's international Ben Gurion **airport.**

Part of our curriculum involved Sun Tzu on "the Art of War" ~~our~~ and~~studying~~ **major battles,** from Arabella to Leuythen(Alexander the Great to Fredrick the Great) ~~starting with the two world wars~~ **and working up to Israel's War of Independence.** And, unlike

Arabella, 48’ war was fresh and close, just 13 years ago. Al the main players still alive, many of them still in uniform. **Before 1948, Lod was not just an Arab village, but a small city called Lydda in Arabic, with nearly 20,000 inhabitants. It also became the focus of an early, defining stage in the war. It lay just** on the main road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, west ~~north~~ **of one of**

the earliest Zionist settlements, Ben Shemen, the site of a celebrated orphanage and school which, like Hulda, had a history of mostly good relations with its Arab neighbors. But as in much of the rest of the country, fighting broke out soon after the UN partition resolution. In December 1947, a convoy heading to Ben Shemen was attacked, and

more than a dozen passengers murdered.

By the spring of 1948, the settlement was under siege.[EB. Rewwrite. It was shortly afterwards that Ben-Gurion – not just to relieve Ben Shemen, but to take control of coastal plane of Palestine for the new state – ordered a major offensive. It was called Larlar, from an acronym of the main intended targets: ~~Latrun~~

~~on the road up to Jerusalem;~~; Lydda itself; **Ramle, just southeast of Lydda**~~; Lydda itself;~~ ;Latrun on the road up to Jerusalem;**and Ramallah on the West Bank. All had been designated as part of an Arab state under the 1947 partition. But the Arabs had said no to partition. Now that war had broken out, Ben-Gurion realized that to make the state defensible, and viable,**

controlling a strip of 20 miles or so along the Mediterranean was essential. Israel's repeated attacks on Latrun, however, were beaten back by Jordanian troops. The idea of attempting to take Ramallah was abandoned. The focus fell on Ramle and the bigger, even more important, target: Lydda. It was especially critical, since it stood astride the main road out of Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The bare facts of what happened are straightforward. On the tenth and eleventh of July 1948, Israeli forces attacked and took all of the Arab villages in the Lydda Valley, on the approaches to the city. On July 11, Moshe Dayan, in command of a recently formed battalion, set off from Ben Shemen with a makeshift armored column which shot its way through the heart of the

city, losing nine men but killing more than a hundred. Any prospect of resistance in Lydda was, at that point, effectively broken. Dayan and his men left. Two Israeli army platoons were sent in, and they stationed men in several key areas around the city. But the next day, a couple of Jordanian armored vehicles entered from the east. With the Israelis fearing a possible

counterattack, and Arab partisans *hoping* for a counterattack, fighting erupted again, with a small number of Israeli casualties but scores of Arab civilians killed. There followed negotiations between the Israeli officer in overall charge and local Arab dignitaries, and on the afternoon of July 13, 1948, the whole population of the city, marching in a long column past

> **Ben Shemen and eastward, was evacuated. Or in effect, expelled.**

> **In recent years, especially for Israel's "new historians", what happened in Lydda has assumed a major symbolic importance. The narrative also figures importantly in a recent book, *My Promised Land*, by Ari Shavit, who is one of our country's leading journalists and writers and also a close**

friend. “Lydda is our black box,” Ari wrote. “In it lies the dark secret of Zionism.” The secret, he said, lay in something that was true, but which has remained uncomfortable for Israelis to acknowledge: “If a Jewish state was going to exist in Palestine, an Arab Lydda could not exist at its center.”

Unlike some of the new historians, Ari did at least

face up squarely to the implications. He said he was sad and horrified by what happened to the Arabs of Lydda. But painful though he clearly found it to acknowledge, he added that if faced with the choice of a State of Israel with the whole of Arab Lydda forced out, or the alternative, the only honest reply was to accept that without taking

> Lydda, there would have been no viable Israeli state.
>
> I'm not sure I'm comfortable with the rhetorical flourishes in Ari's account. Terms like "black box" and "dark secret" almost suggest a need for a demonstration of national shame, something which, after spending much of my life as a soldier, I feel is an unfair and partial reading of what happened. Israel did not need,

nor want, a war as some rite of birth. But if we were forced to fight for the establishment of the state, a state that had some chance of surviving and prospering, Operation Larlar was simply an exercise in strategic common sense. As someone who has not just seen wars, but fought in them, the ethical imperative to me as a Jew and a Zionist has always been to secure the objective,

and to defeat the enemy, with the minimum of civilian casualties that is possible. The expulsion of the people of Lydda seemed to me, as a trainee officer in the spring of 1962, as it seems to me now, to have met that test.

But Ari was right to say there was an inherent tension between the creation of our state and some of the things we did, however logical or

necessary, to secure it.

Nowhere was this more powerful than in places like Lydda. The man who signed the order for the expulsion was Yitzhak Rabin, then the deputy to the operational commander of the area, former Palmach leader Yigal Allon. Much later, after I had spent years working alongside Rabin and had risen to become chief of staff, the two of us were talking late one

night in the *kirya*, the military headquarters complex in the heart of Tel Aviv. He was Prime Minister, but also Defense Minister, and had an office there. As sometimes happened, our conversation turned to the early years of the state, and, for the first time, to Lydda. Rabin was not only the officer who gave the order to expel the inhabitants. He was the only person in the

entire chain of command explicitly to address the issue at all. I don’t think he regretted doing what he did. But he smiled ruefully when he told me how the need to put something in writing, and actually give the order, had fallen to him.

With Lydda firmly under Israeli control, Allon had gone to see Ben-Gurion. He asked him, not once but several

times, what they were to do about the thousands of Arabs living there. Ben-Gurion kept changing the subject. As he always did, he was writing down a record of the conversation as it wandered off in other directions. Only at the door on the way out, seeing that Ben-Gurion had left his notebook inside, did Allon press him a final time. “What should we do with the population?” he asked.

According to Rabin, who said he had heard the account from Allon himself, Ben-Gurion still wouldn’t reply directly. But his parting words made his message clear. “Do what has to be done,” he told his commander.

As a trainee officer, my own most vivid impression of what happened in Lydda did not relate to the expulsion. It concerned what Ari Shavit’s

book called the “massacre” that occurred the day after Dayan’s capture of the city. To the extent it *was* a massacre, rather than the result of miscalculations on both sides when the Jordanian armored vehicles strayed into the city, I remember feeling how unnecessary the civilian deaths were. We had arrived in what was now the Israeli city of Lod from the direction of Ben-

Shemen, retracing the route taken first by Dayan and then by the two platoons sent in after he had left. Having by now spent months studying how large-scale army operations worked, I was astounded by the failure of planning on our side. Lydda was home to thousands of people. It covered something like four square miles. It had commerce, and light industry. The idea that

it could be held by a couple of platoons, fewer than 100 troops, was absurd. It was also a recipe for panic at the first sign of trouble, which was what happened, with tragic consequences.EB.]

* * *

I was now being ~~as~~**chosen**~~ked~~ **to command a** Company size Task Force ~~"force"~~ **nearly** **two**~~three~~

times that size, all six of our slightly smaller cadet platoons, in the night raid exercise~~mock attack~~ **on the original site of** The Farmhouse in~~Kibbutz~~ **Hulda** forest, as it was called.

I had never commanded an independent squad, before or during the the course, the role of a corporal. (Just once or twice a I've commanded a squad within a platoon, led by

another Cadet during “his” turn in command role) And now I’m ordered to command a full size reinforced Company, the usual role of a Captain .**I**’ve noticed both the complement and the test, embedded in choosing me to lead one of the two most lucrative exercises of the whole course (the other one will be described later).Good news was it was a night raid exercise. Something I’ve

repeatedly participated in preparing and executing as a soldier in The Unit,on all different tasks, led by some of the best commanders the Israeli Army had. I felt highly challenged, but at MY element. alerted, focused energized and ready. ~~had never done anything remotely similar. But I felt a bit like when I'd volunteered to lead the supply convoy during the Rotem Crisis~~. **Though**

I wasn’t sure that I’d succeed, I did feel a basic level of confidence, a sense that I had the knowledge and tools to do what was required~~. I had now spent more than five months studying how such operations were supposed to work. I had watched other cadets, in smaller-scale exercises, put what we’d been taught into practice.~~ **I also knew the terrain around Hulda. Although**

we had never staged a sayeret raid~~exercise~~ **there, we had trekked through the area around it. I'd also been to Hulda on a number of occasions as a child, visiting Gordonia friends of my mother.**

[EB. Sounds to me an overdose of reliance on MHZ.]~~Still, as Meir Har-Zion had drilled into us, I knew this simple familiarity was not enough. "An hour for an hour,"~~

~~he had told us~~. I was informed of my task on Thursday before leaving for a short weekend at MH. The preparations for the raid should start by Sunday noon time when all cadets are back. And the raid itself on Monday night. So I had some time to prepare myself, and then some thirty hours with the whole course practically under my command before we start trekking on Monday night,

immediately after dark toward Hulda Forest.

I began with detailed topographical maps. I worked out a route that would require us to cover about 10~~2~~ miles in each direction. It avoided/**skirted the main roads,** ~~and the larger towns~~ **or settlements**, all of them were supposed to be “enemy hold outs”. We were over 150 soldiers on the column and had

to avoid any contact with anybody along the way. **It was as direct as possible, while also remaining as inconspicuous as possible. We would go due south at first, then edge around a** big ~~small~~ **kibbutz called Naan, then bend southeast toward the pine** (?) Hulda Forest. ~~f~~I then planned the raid itself. According to the intelligence report I got, the Farm house was a regimental

enemy command post with about 20 officers and some Nco’s, defended by a force of two full platoons, some 70 fighters altogether, equipped beyond personal weapons with heavy machine guns, some projectors and light mortars. And their parent company and a neighboring company could join within 10 to 20 minutes respectively in a case the command post is attacked. There

was no live fire in the exercise, but there was “enemy”, played by several dozens of soldiers from the officers school directed by few officers. They had their binoculars ,ears and non lethal weapons and fireworks equipment which enabled them to respond , the moment they identify the coming attack, to “call reinforcements” or to stage a counter attack. Thus, it was

crucial to reach surprise, and to avoid an early exposure. To deploy sub units on the two main roads leading to the Farmhouse from different directions in order to block possible reinforcements long before they could intervene. And there was a need to create effective, strong enough assault force, to take over the command post while having enough supporting/covering

machine guns and mortars firepower from a non moving sub unit of the raiding force, deployed in a good adjacent position, to suppress enemy fire and avoid internal maneuvering inside the enemy’s command post compound during the attack. These subtle, sometimes contradicting demands is what make raids, and especially night raids so challenging. The plan should answer those needs,

but should be kept simple," If it's not SIMPLE, it SIMPLY does'nt work" we say (sounds better in Hebrew) like KISS (keep it simple, stupid!). It can not end up TOO simple on the other hand, and should be kept flexible, quickly adapting to changes imposed by the enemy responses, without losing sight, even for a split second of The OBJECTIVE which has to be accomplished. That's why

night raids is the business of the best maned , best trained, top ranking Units.

I planned it carefully, measured the platoon commanders Cadets whom I’ve got. Who will get which part of it?. How to redistribute/ allocate the heavy weapons and their operating teams. Where exactly should the different sub units deploy, how they get there and what should activate them. How

am I going to control the raid and communicate changes where needed? What and how, should occur automatically, even if no communication can be achieved along the actual execution? How our wounded or “killed”(exercise-wise)soldiers are going to be treated, by whom? At what stages? And so on.

Now that I knew how I WISHED the operation to develop, I

started looking at what can go wrong?, walking ,mentally, through what we called in The Unit “events (unwanted, but possible) and responses”, what can actually happen and how to respond, if one of the units had been exposed ***before*** time, and final deployment of the others cannot be orderly completed? What if a reinforcement happened to be quicker or stronger than

predicted? If a slight modification of the assault direction is needed as a result of what we see when we come there?,If a leading assault team is blocked and has heavy casualties, and so on. What are the answers and which of them is relevant enough to become part of my briefing ,or even a subject for a short training session for certain sub unit,

in spite of the tight preparation schedule?.

I wrote down everything on a legal pad-like Cadet notebook, Before I went to sleep Saturday night in MH, I had everything there/in place, the “Operation Order”, the accurate path on the map, the “briefing points” to the Commanders group, as well as to the whole “operation force”, the “time line” and different missions to all sub

units for the 30 hours of “battle preparations” all written accurately and succinctly on my notepad. I even spent several hours on the map rehearsing the path we have to navigate. I’ve realized it might end up too risky to lose it all by accidental navigational mistake of a cadet or two who could not have enough time to make sure they really know the way. I slept

well that night. And woke up fully ready for the next 48 hours, eager for action.~~orest near Hulda. With most of the force deployed in a wide ring to provide fire cover, real-time intelligence, and the manpower and weaponry to complete our securing of the building, I designated a smaller, sayeret-style unit to make the actual assault.~~

Sunday at noon I brought together the six platoon commanders and another two sub unit commanders and gave them an overview of the plan, a detailed time- line for the next 30 hours and a list of other related elements which had to be completed in order to enable the whole thing to fly. By late afternoon under the Eucaliptuses shadow we gathered the whole officers course,more

than 150 cadets sitting on the ground, platoon besides platoon, six of them in a half moon bow around me, the instructors, some 25 officers of different ranks from Lt. to Lt. Col. Sitting on military long benches on two sides of the bow. I first gave the ‘Operation Order” according to the well known rules and the same order of issues which people used to hear in other

platoon level exercises, just adopted to the bigger force and more sub units. I was curious , slightly tense before I've started. I had my note book in my hand, but did not have to open it. The amount of intensive, deliberate energy invested in writing it down, fully, instilled clarity and fluence in my mind. My tongue was rolling.~~My~~

Than came the briefing, which is much more subtle. Night raids tend to turn chaotic at early stage of execution. People get easily confused at night , especially under fire. Many lose simple orientation and literal sense of direction, and cease reading events as they unfold. The enemy knows the place better and has several pre programmed/ trained responses, that might

complicate the situation. Momentum of an attack can be easily lost. And freezing paralysis, growing casualties, even despair can take hold. That’s why it is so crucial in night raids to have the whole force being briefed together,*all* soldiers should understand the wider picture. What and how we are determined to achieve? Why it is done this way? What are the main

obstacles? How we intend to overcome them? Why it will never follow the script? And how, in spite of all surprises, casualties and uncertainties , we will not return without a mission- accomplished.

Most soldiers can not reconstruct all the details of a briefing once it was ended , but they get the essence of it and the strength, determination and resolve behind the joint

burdening of the mission of which they are a part. It cannot be too long or going into ALL details of EVERY move. But it should, in an extremely deliberate, inclusive, convincing and self confidant manner, convey the most crucial concrete elements of what is to be done, combined with an unequivocal message: “Someone has to rise to the task!. Now, it’s us!. It won’t be a picnic,

but a tough test. “When the going get’s tough, the tough gets going”. We have to do it. And We will”. It worked once and again in the past because it was true. And in moments of truth, the sheer Truth is really powerful.

The “fog of War” with all the above mentioned destructive forces/elements are suppressed by the mutual trust among fighters in a cohesive, well

trained unit; and by the confidence of fighters in the leadership and winning capacities of their commanders. Those could hardly be reached during a (relatively) short and low interaction course.

But I felt deeply focused ,yet confident and relaxed during this briefing.I realized many of the cadets had never in their military experience participated in a

large scale night raid exercise. And many of the instructors had never commanded such an exercise. I did realy felt I know what I’m doing. I’ve learned later, they felt the same. ~~first challenge, once I’d refined the plan, was to deliver the operational briefing in front of the whole corps of cadets. I had spent even more than Meir’s prescribed “hour for hour” in~~

~~making sure I was aware not only of what I'd have to do as commander, but how each platoon's role fit in to making sure the operation went off smoothly. All that preparation was liberating. With maps furled under my arm, I entered the largest of our classrooms, on the second floor of the main building. The confidence which I felt in the plan, and in~~ **my understanding of every detail,**

allowed me to keep my presentation and briefing **short, low-key** like**, crisp and clear, and to provide equally economical replies to the few questions that arose from individual platoon officers.**

~~No one had told me that this was how best to conduct a briefing. But I'd learned from being on the other side of the process, with Meir and his comrades in the sayeret and our~~

~~senior officers and instructors during our course. The more that they knew, it seemed, the less they needed to say. The combination of the simplicity of their message, and the confidence they projected, had a powerful effect~~.[EB. Probably we should find other place? To put this Reichman remark. In fact I was surprised to hear it from him in front of an audience years later. **Only**

after the operation in Hulda had been completed, without a hitch, did I realize I had managed to hit the right note. A fellow cadet named Uriel Reichman came up to me in the dining hall a few days later. I barely knew him at the time, though we would become friends when he left the army, excelled as a law professor, and then entered politics. He was in another platoon at officers’

school, ~~alongside Uri Zakay and Shai Tamari~~. Smiling, he told me he had found my briefing extraordinary. Physically, I still looked more like a high school student than an army officer. “But the way you handled it, it was like watching an experienced commander.” And though I’d been too busy getting the presentation right to notice, he told me that our *real*

commanders— were writing for themselves, my briefing notes for a night raid. In a kind of reverse direction teaching processwere nodding in approval as I spoke.

The night raid exercise started with a long march. A strange feeling for me. I spent most of the last two years in night training. But usually with another 2-4 soldiers. I have now more than 150 behind

me.when we had to cross a fence along the path and turned from two columns to one I ordered the last Cadet/”officer” in the column to report to me when HE crossed it. It took almost ten precious minutes. Pulling a monster.after three and half hours we reached into Hulda Forest. We separate from the road blocking sub units . when we came closer we sent, somewhat ahead of the assault

force which I led , the Heavily equipped “fire Base” to deploy on its final spot and be ready.The idea was that if we get exposed before the “fire base” had reached its final position we will get under too heavy fire without a cover from our side.However, they were exposed as they were deploying the machine guns and the mortars. I ordered immediate assault and when we reached the

point where we started shooting the “fire base” opened fire as well. We stormed the main HQ and the Farmhouse. Got several “casualties, to be medically treated and carried the whole way back on stretches.One of the Blocking forces entered into “battle” and had to be later supported before they could accomplish discontact from the enemy force they engaged. Many developments. But

none out of the envelope we discussed through the preparations phase. When we triumphantly “retreated” and started the long march back towards our ”lines”, being slowed only by the wounded stretches, I knew we’ve done it. And well.

I did not get one of the command roles in the other **final**, company level, **exercise a week later. It was** a ~~the most~~

complex and demanding one~~of the entire course~~. **Though we had gone up against "enemy" forces in** ~~limited~~ **tactical exercises,** including the night raid I've commanded,the "enemy" was always "directed" to serve the purposes of the training needs and script. T~~t~~**his was a full-scale** open ended **war game,** where each side tries and get a fair shot in defeating the other side. Like any other

ballgame. **It pitted half of our training** force, ~~company~~ **against the other, three** platoons, organized as a Company,~~battalions~~ **versus the other three** organized as another company. **We were vying for supremacy in a 60-square-mile rectangle of densely** high bushes covered/**forested land which climbed** ~~steeply~~ gradual**ly toward Jerusalem, south**we~~ea~~**st of the city and not far from**

what was then the west bank border with Jordan. We were given a day-or so~~and-a-half~~ to prepare. The contest itself was designed to last 36 hours, starting after sunset on a late April evening and ending after~~at~~ midnight the next day. Once the exercise began, each side had two hours to set up its operational headquarters anywhere on its territory. Only then were the rival

forces/**armies allowed to move, their every action monitored and marked by embedded instructors. The victor would be the** side/**army that managed to identify and attack the enemy's command post first** with enough force of his own to "announce victory" as judged by the council of instructors, who served as judges and refferies.

Our side's commander was Shai Tamari, f~~, and he had a~~

~~task much more complicated than planning a mock assault on Hulda. F~~**irst of all, he had to choose a location for our command post which would make it tough for the other side to discover. Then, without knowing where the other side's headquarters was, he had to deploy our forces in a way that would maximize our chances of mounting an attack** on the rival's HQ, **before time**

expired, if and when we even found it. We were also operating at a topographical disadvantage. The huge expanse of woodland sloped upward from west to east – from the Tel Aviv side of the forest toward Jerusalem. Our half was on the west.

Yet however complex the planning requirements, the key to victory was simple. Each side had to keep its post from

getting found, and discover the enemy’s as early as possible, and then, based on in-advance preparation, to launch the attack. Shai addressed the first task by establishing not one, but two command posts. The real one was completely hidden by trees and bushes. The decoy headquarters was a mile closer to the dividing line between our territory and the other side’s and was *almost*

completely hidden. It was illuminated by a light bulb not quite perfectly shaded, beside a jeep with one end sticking out from under its camouflage netting.

Shai delegated the second imperative – finding the other side's headquarters – to me and to Uri Zakay. Or, as he called us, his _private_ Sayeret Matkal reconnaissance unit.

Uri and I spent the day before the exercise poring over a military map of the area, and identifying the three most proba ~~possi~~**ble spots where *we* would establish our command post if we were on the other side. It would have to be relatively close to the far edge of the forest, just as ours was near to the western side** in order to make it more complicated and time consuming

to find, since the rules allowed for only a two-hour window to put it in place. Since they had been given the high ground, there would be an even greater temptation to pick a spot fairly close to the top, not only minimizing interference in our rudimentary field radio communications but giving them a line of sight if we were to launch a frontal attack.

The next thing we did was map out our reconnaissance mission. We identified a ~~well-~~ heavily bushy~~protected~~ hilltop a mile ~~couple of hundred yards~~ in from the back end of the other side's territory. We would have a view of two of the three proba~~ossi~~ble command sites we had identified. By moving seventy ~~fifty~~ yards further to the south~~up~~, we would be able to see the third,

but not the first two. **We** suspected that the other side might get our radio frequencies and will actively monitor it. So we **sat down with the two other cadets who Shai had put in charge of communications and agreed a** code ~~numerical code for each of the likely locations for the enemy headquarters, and another~~ **set of** words and **numbers to tell them** where the HQ is set and

how many men and vehicles were there, together with some other tricks to allow it appear as a routine *unimportant* exchange. Our thought was that~~So~~ **if we did find** the rival's HQ~~it, a ten-second message by field radio would free our force to approach and attack~~, we can report it briefly and minimizing the risk they will know we'd found them.~~.~~

Shai enthusiastically signed off the plan. The only problem came when he presented it to our instructors. He told them that Uri and I had been designated to “disappear” on our mission as soon as the two-hour period at the beginning of the exercise was over. But the instructors insisted that in order to evaluate our part – and verify our “capture” if we were intercepted – one of them

had to go along with us. Shai protested. So did we. The whole point of our role was to be able to sneak in with the least possible chance of being discovered. That would a lot harder with an instructor along. Eventually, a compromise was agreed. One of the younger instructors, a Lt.~~guy~~ from the Golani Brigade, would come along, dressed in camouflage fatigues like us, and accepting

that he'd have to hold off any verbal comment or evaluation until later, in order not to risk tipping off the other side to our mission.

We headed out as soon as the two-hour grace period was over, with a half-hour's light remaining before nightfall. The quickest way across the forest would have been a straight line. It was also the one where we'd be most likely to be

spotted. So we set off along the perimeter of the vast wooded rectangle, nearly four hours, almost all of it uphill. All of it in silence except for the occasional whisper or the cluck of a cheek or a muted whistle between me and Uri to avoid boulders or tree trunks, bushes or brambles. All of it darkness, feeling our way forward without using even our penlights. It was nearly two in

the morning when we reached our hilltop lookout, and crawled forward to establish the quietest route to the second vantage spot if it turned out that we needed it. We kept using only hand signals while building from bushes and dry foliage a covered camouflaged observation post. In fact ,two of them. Because of the alternative place to look at. We entered into it quietly just

before dawn. Me and Uri looking forward. We were behind the rivals possible positions and higher up, looking downward,. the LT. covering our back sector.~~. But now that we were in place, we figured the chances of getting spotted were remote. They might be expecting a reconnaissance mission. But they would be looking for a threat from in front, and~~

~~below. We were behind them, and higher up.~~

**We didn’t need our second observation post. A few hours after dawn, we saw a couple of soldiers emerge from a dense cover of trees and bushes – the second of the three sites we had identified as proba~~ossi~~ble command posts. Then, another couple of guys about a half-hour later. It still wasn’t conclusive.~~. Uri and I crawled~~

~~about 20 or 30 yards higher up the hill, looking for a further sign.~~ **We** waited for validation and **spotted it almost immediately: the back end of a water trailer, just a narrow strip of** light brown painted, barrel-like shaped **metal, not quite completely covered by camouflage netting, in the morning sun. Even if, like Shai, the other side had set up a dummy headquarters, it seemed**

unlikely they would have gone to the trouble of bringing in the couple of hundred gallons of water needed for a real command post. ~~. We returned to our lookout point.~~ **Almost immediately, we got a final sign of confirmation. We heard the thud of a heavy** metal **object being dropped by someone inside the wooded recess** on some other metal object**. I radioed in the agreed code to**

Shai’s communications officers, and we settled down in silence to wait and watch.

Our side’s “attack” came an hour after dark. Shai started to move his attacking forces on the verge of the allowed areas when the sun was still quite high. And immediately after darkness changed direction and converged from both sides on the Rivals HQ. ~~90 minutes later: two small flanking~~

~~teams,~~ **neither of them intercepted or even spotted. Our embedded instructor, and theirs, inside the command post, needed only a matter of** minutes~~seconds~~ **to confer. The war game, more than** 8~~12~~ **hours before it had been due to end, was over.** The other side did not find even the Dummy HQ of our side. And found itself sitting blinded and paralyzed.

Several~~Two~~ **days later, the course formally ended as well.** Both myself and Uri passed it with the highest possible grade, ~~All of us passed,~~ **a particular relief in my case given my early struggles.**

Before I had left for officer’s training, Digli, one of the sayeret future commanders, noticing I’d never been to any Army course, told me to think of the course as a

“ crossing of a dirty swimming pool under the water” like the one in Ramat HaKovesh, his kibbutz, or in Mishmar Hasharon, mine.. “You take a deep breath,jump in. You submerge and swim under water. You can barely see. You’ve to hold your breath long, its demanding, till you hit the other end wall. Then, raise your head out of the dirty water. Its over!!. The dirty

swimming pool is behind you. The achievement-is yours!.” He said officers’ school was like that. “ It’s demanding and needs long breath, it’s not always nice or make you feel good. You’re not sure, when you climb out on the other side, how much you’ve actually learned. But you come out *different*. You jump in as a soldier. You raise your head out as an officer, a

transformed person. It changes your *attitude* to execution, to leadership, to life and to *your* role in it. The mentality is new. No matter what you go on to do afterwards, You are a ***different***, better fit, man."

Families were invited to the base in Sirkin for graduation ceremony. My parents and young brothers included.~~But~~ **I was also one of the six cadets**

singled out for commendation and selected to receive our new badges of rank, as second lieutenants, from the deputy chief-of-staff: Yitzhak Rabin. [EB.There is a telling picture of YR putting the ranks on my shoulders. Related to the following anecdote.] Rabin had been through such rituals several times. Me too, in later years had done it dozens of times as well: being Ramatkal,

Min. of Defense , Prime Min. etc. You use the opportunity to exchange few words with each commended Cadet. You can’t remember it later. But for the cadet, it’s his first direct conversation with a person at the top. He always well remember it. So, Rabin approached me,got from his entourage the 2nd Lt. ranks and platoon commander pin and asked me ;’where are you from? ‘MH’ I

answered, that was not a surprise. Five out of the six were Kibbutzniks. ‘Which unit’? He followed asking, ‘269’, I answered. (this was The Unit number, and the name used at higher corridors. Sayeret Matkal, was a name invented by Avraham, not a formal one). Rabin’s eyebrows were raised? He seemed surprised, as if something does’nt fit. He turned his head to look at

HakKa, a leading person in the parachutists history, and now the Officer’s School Commander, than back at me and shot: ‘What is 269 doing *here?* And since when you are wearing red berets?’ (from his time at the head of Northern Command (56’-57’), he knew Avrema’le the dreamer, of Safad/Tzfat base , unit 154, of Arab agents and petty Intelligence

~~Before I had left fo~~. Rabin had also a somewhat frustrating visit to The Unit, about a year earlier, where we showed him, in the field near our base, our ideas of cutting railway lines deep behind enemy lines with a robot-like cart (aka “the Tarataike”), his judgment then was: “it’s funny toy, but who the hell is going to risk the life of a single soldier for

this, in a ***real*** war?”. Not a great complement.

So, Rabin at a time did not think highly of The Unit. And in fact, technically speaking he was right. It was a ***First***. Our Cadets, including Amsalem, Yori, Tubul etc, Had never been to the Infantry Officers Course, they all went to the much shorter, 90 days, less demanding course for “others”,

who were not supposed to lead infantry platoons in battle.

I answered Rabin's question calmly: "I thought that's the right place for us. So, I've applied and accepted." The very fact I was standing there in front of him validated, in hindsight, my judgment. A hint of a controlled smile appeared on his face. I did not know how to read it. I did not tell Rabin that when I went to

Officer’s School, I were not sure I’m even going to end up back in The Unit. Castel would not assure me. So, I did it in a way in order to make sure that if I won’t end up being back to The Unit, I can still join, on my own merits, any other good infantry/ parachutists unit.

~~r officer’s training, one of the sayeret commanders told me to think of the course as a~~

~~“dirty swimming pool” like the one in Mishmar Hasharon. “You jump in. You swim. You can barely see. But then you get to the other end.” He said officers’ school was like that. “You’re not sure, when you climb out on the other side, how much you’ve actually learned. But you come out ***different***. You go in as a soldier. You come out as an officer. It changes your~~

~~***attitude***. The mentality is new. No matter what you go on to do afterwards.”~~

* * *

I was eager to return to the unit. And based on Officer’s School results it became clear, I will. Especially since Avraham, too, was now back in charge.[EB. Dovik joined several months later. I think. Have to check.] and had

promoted Shai Tamari’s elder brother,Dovik, a Major now , who had been brought up as a Company A soldier (of MHZ), as his deputy.

I did feel a new confidence as I made my way back across the base to Sayeret Matkal. I was no longer a draftee. I was a ~~paid,~~ professional special forces ~~army~~ **officer. My six months away in the “real” army**

had given me a wider perspective on the sayeret. I realized how differently it was structured. Technically, an officer in The Unit commanded a squad, Team we called it, of ten , not a platoon of over thirty, with several squad commanders under his control ~~we were a platoon, but only about two-thirds the normal size~~, **with our own improvised approach to command structure,**

training, and operations. And our own, distinctly un-army-like ethos.– I felt , that at certain aspects of the profession we are really better. Better prepared , better trained, faster , curious and more adaptiveBut ~~especially after the final war game, I was even more certain that the unit which Avraham Arnan had created could play a crucial part even in~~

~~conventional operations~~. Good for future challenges and a source for pride.

Avraham got an approval to get ***his*** two new officers, Zakai and myself back to The Unit. We were happy. ~~I was eager to return to the unit, especially since Avraham, too, was now back in charge and had promoted Shai Tamari's brother, Dovik, as his deputy.~~

~~What I didn’t know was that I was about to be promoted as well. In addition to the hands-on training provided by Meir and his band of commandos, the sayeret did have some formal command structure. Two officers were in charge, one for each half of our two dozen soldiers.~~

Now, The Unit ~~we~~ **were due to get,** two new Teams, **a dozen** recruites each, ~~more~~ **from the summer** (Aug 62’) **and autumn**

(Nov 62’) **drafts. And Avraham told me he was giving me command of the** first~~new~~ **group.**

It was May 62’.Yet, having in mind that after we select them as they drafted, they go to ***Tironut*** of three and half months in Parachutists/ Batallion 890, it was clear I’ll start to train them late November 62’ (and Uri will start his team by late Feb 63’). It gave me some six

months of “free” time. I could never guess in advance how lucky I ended, having it.

~~That was just one of a series of surprises in store.~~ **With Meir Amit’s energetic backing as head of military intelligence, Avraham’s vision of Sayeret Matkal as an *Intelligence* *operational* force seemed about to reach fruition.**

[EB. I think that’s the place to put the story of the

Egyptian agent who disappeared in Gaza during an operation with the new bugging system and the new Motorola. This was the ***turning*** *point* , when deeply frustrated Amit threw all his weight and prestige behind his conviction that the next operation should be lead by IDF soldiers. Namely Sayeret Matkal.EB]

The Sinai cable project, with its refrigerator-sized

intercept machine, had been shelved, at least until the engineers will prove~~we could figure out a way to ensure~~ **it might work.** Following the debacle in Gaza,~~But~~ **Amit had** ~~somehow~~ **convinced**, at least on principle, ~~not only~~ both **chief-of-staff** ~~T~~**Z**~~a~~**vi Tzur,** as well as Rabin, his deputy (**but Ben-Gurion**)[EB. (is this really effective to mention B.G so often, as if he was a “family

member” of all this stuff?)], **to move** on **beyond the** 7 years old **trauma of Uri Ilan’s suicide**– and be ready, when circumstances and technology get ripe, to have it executed by us. Together they were able to convince, on principle, B.G as well~~nearly a decade earlier~~.

The Unit~~We~~ **were told** already in early April **to prepare** itself for telephone poles bugging. With a farsighted

vision/intention on Amit's mind, which was not shared with the Team and the officers, except for Avraham, **to return to the Golan Heights. If all went well, we** might, in the near future, ~~would~~ **be planting a bugging device which, for the first time since the 1950s, would give Israel real-time intercepts of Syrian military communications.**

The man chosen to command the operation had impressed me from the start. Ya'akov Tal – or Tubul, as he was known – was a year older than me. He starte~~had~~ ~~done~~ **his army service in the** Sayeret of **Golani Brigade. When I joined the sayeret** ([EB. Ned, here you can see why I think it will be more clear if we call ourselves The Unit. Sayeret(s) we had several .EB], **he was** away~~away~~**. But he**

returned a few months later, fresh from completing officers' school. He came from an old, modest means, highly respected ~~established~~ **Sephardi family in the northern city of Tiberias. As a teenager, he had helped support them by working afternoons and weekends alongside Arab shepherds in the hills above the Sea of Galilee, picking up a near-fluent command of conversational**

Arabic. He was a model army officer: strongly built, quietly self-confident without a trace of arrogance, and with a natural talent for connecting with his soldiers. In my case, there was a further bond: his fascination and excellence **with math and sciences. Shortly after I got back**– from Officer's School~~to the sayeret~~**, however, he told** Avraham that~~me~~ **he had applied to the**

electronics faculty ~~faculty~~ **in the top** technological institute ~~science university~~ **in the country, the Technion, near Haifa. A few weeks later, he was accepted. He would be leaving at the start of the academic year in September** 62’**.**

Tubul was still training hard with the four men from his Team **he was** preparing~~due~~ **to lead onto** a possible bugging operation.~~the Golan~~**. But by**

early August, we had yet to receive the final go-ahead. Meir Amit was facing a serious case of cold feet at General H~~h~~**eadquarters,** when he tried to translate the ‘on principle’ “green light” into a concrete operation with an objective and a date. **and Avraham knew it was increasingly unlikely we would get the green light** for action **before Tubul left for** – Technion~~university~~**. So he**

called both Tubul and me into his office. He told us that he wanted me to be ready to step in as commander.

Tubul ~~not only~~ understood the need for a back-up plan. He accepted that unless we suddenly got the approval to move, I would be leading the mission which he and the team had already spent months preparing. ~~He now threw himself with equal energy into bringing~~

~~me fully up to speed, and we~~ We **both began an intensive series of ~~exercises~~ exchang**__**es**__ **to ensure that, whoever ended up being in charge, the operation would have the best possible chance of succeeding.**

~~One reason Avraham had chosen me to step in was purely practical. My new team of recruits wouldn’t be arriving until after their ***tironut***. So at this stage, I was a~~

~~commander without a unit.~~

Still, Avraham~~he~~ **must have had some doubts about whether I would be up to the task of leading our first operation. If so, he kept them to himself.** In fact, he did not have many alternatives. —**Years later, he told me** he used his intuitions, more than any well thought analysis.H~~h~~**e realized I had no experience of a real cross-border mission, but also knew**

that was true of everyone else **in the sayeret.** MHZ was long time already in his farm and Kapusta in civilian life. Errol left for another unit (?), and Dovik was still on the ‘Planning board’ some four months before he will come. **In his view, the qualities that would matter most were self-confidence, attention to detail, and an ability to think and act in response to what**

happened on the ground. All qualities, he said, that he felt ~~was sure~~ **I possessed.** Whether he could really judge it at the time, or just rationalized it in retrospect, I can not tell. It was an opportunity. God knows if and when it'll occur again. So, probably he just stepped in, hoping that~~.~~ ~~In fact, I believe he had such firm confidence in~~ **the training we had been given**~~.~~

~~in the sayeret~~, and the ethos he had instilled, ~~that he felt any of us~~ would ~~be~~ enable us to deal with whatever might be thrown at us.

By the time we next heard from Meir Amit, a week later, it was clear the Golan mission would not take place in time for Tubul to lead it. It had, finally, been approved. But on one condition. First, we would have to show that we were

ready, by staging a ~~dry~~ foreplay_run across the border into Lebanon in the final days of August.

Tubul commanded the operation, with me as his deputy. The hills of southern Lebanon less forbidding terrain than the Golan, but otherwise the task was the same: to install the bugging apparatus on a telephone pole across the border. We chose a stretch of

roadway near a village called Beit Yahoun. It was four or five ~~four or five~~ **miles inside Lebanon. But since it lay behind the much larger town of Bint Jbeil, we had to snake through fields**, ~~and~~ **fruit groves** and open areas around the village of Yaroun **and approach in a wide arc from behind, nearly 10 miles in all. The only hitch came when we were halfway there.** [EB.I think

it happened on the way back. I'll check.EB.] ~~We met a group of Lebanese farmers walking the other way. *But* Tubul exchanged a few words in Arabic with them, and we were back on our way.~~ **When we reached** the telephone line, along the road to **Beit Yahoun,** one of the soldiers and ~~he~~ **and I served as lookouts**, some 100 yards on each direction, hiding besides the road **as the others in the**

team scaled the telephone pole and slotted in the listening device. We didn’t like to return the same way, so now we had to make another 9 miles tour snaking between Aynata , and then Eitaroun all around the dominating mountain of Maroun a Ras. It was around 4am near Eitaroun that we met a Lebanese farmer walking before dawn the other way. Too late to avoid contact. Last thing we

needed was to open fire. It would prove for all our opponents that The Unit *can not* make it into even simpler case enemy territory and come out without being exposed, and the blunder which might follow. Tubul exchanged a few words in Arabic with him. I was the last in the short column, and could not even hear what he told him, but the trouble was over and we were back on our way. **In**

another hour-and-a-half almost at sunrise, **we were back in Israel. More importantly, the unit worked.** A sigh of relief. We've crossed a major mile stone. The other day, based on the Lebanese operation success, Meir Amit got a conditional 'green light' to go ahead with the Golan mission. We were informed and it became immediately clear that we are on the verge of a possible new

chapter. –**Rather than risk its getting discovered, we went back** a week ~~in a two days~~ **later to remove**~~d~~ the bugging device from Beit Yahoon.~~it.~~ **This time, I was in command, with an eye toward the mission onto the Golan.**

The last-minute jitters which had required us to do the proving~~dry~~ **run underscored the pressure still felt by everyone, from (Ben Gurion**? 76

years old (?)) and the chief-of-staff on down, to avoid a repeat of the debacle of 1954. I could feelfelt it too. ~~The outline of our ow Golan operation had been decided months earlier~~. We would be starting from the far northeast corner of Israel, a small patch of parkland on the upper/ eastern edge of Tel Dan, a historic archaeological site near a kibbutz called Dan. It

was just two miles to the North ~~the same spot~~ **from where the Uri Ilan group had set off. Only this time, the target Meir Amit had selected was more ambitious. In the 1950s,** MHZ team~~we had~~ **placed the intercept on the telephone line heading south from** Banias camp, **the Syrians' main base on the** Northern **Golan** sector, along~~near~~ **the Banias** and later Jordan **River**s**, to their forward**

units overlooking the Sea of Galilee. This time, we intended to bug the line running east toward Quneitra – the largest town, and the Syrians' military headquarters, on the Heights. That meant taking a longer route, beginning with a climb onto a wide plateau about 200 feet high, and then crossing the Banias River toward the Syrian Banias army camp.

Following the removal operation near Beit Yahoun we had almost three weeks to prepare,to polish the technical performance with the bugging system, now equipped with a innate booby trap.~~Once Tubul left the sayeret, we trained for a further three weeks,~~ **trying to anticipate all the things that might go wrong.** **Syrian** fixed posts, ambushes, **patrols~~,~~ and anti-personnel**

mines, were at the top of the list. I got a detailed map of the area from our army's northern command intelligence unit,**which,** several enemy squad side positions on the 200' high platform we had to cross. Moreove, **in theory at least,** the map **indicated the location of anti-personnel mine** fields~~s~~ **along the edge of the Golan. But the map had been drawn up over a period of years, from**

the early 1950s, on the basis of information from local shepherds, smugglers or the occasional agent. Whenever they reported seeing the telltale combination of protective fencing and yellow danger triangles, since the mines had to be identifiable for civilians and the Syrians' own troops, the place was marked on the map, (hopefully accurately, because there was no GPS, and

the informers were not experts of navigation) **as a suspected mine field. The problem was that once a place was marked, no one** could ,or dared to earase it~~made a systematic effort to confirm the reports and, more importantly, to check over time whether an area was still mined~~. **The result was that the map now showed an almost unbroken stretch of minefields**, some times two or

even three successive lines, **in the area we planned to cross onto the Golan Heights. It was almost certainly inaccurate. But there seemed no practical way of updating the information**, within the limited time, **before we set off.**

The timing was chosen by the cycle of the moon. We wanted to cross into Syria in as near to total darkness as possible. That meant the final couple of

days of September. As the mission drew nearer, we reviewed and refined our plans with the technological unit. Even though the bugging device had been improved, and they'd done their best to match the casing to old photos of Syrian telephone poles, we decided to take a total of four units with us, each with a slightly different design/and different off white color. If we did

manage to make it there and back without getting caught, we would install the one which most closely matched the real isolator on the telephone pole. We would take the original isolator with us. So, ~~We also planned to take an up-to-date photo, so the tech people could refine the design.~~ o~~O~~**n our next operation, we could swap in** with totally identical ~~their new~~ **unit.**

We made an exercise in the North , trying to create similar physical experience. And we had several live fire night exercises to make sure we are all on the same page, and trust each other on shooting together. The soldiers met Me and my new deputy, 2nd Lt. Avi Telem only for few weeks. Unlike Tubul, who trained them and with them from their 1st day in The Unit. I've planned the

detailed path we will take and we all started to learn it by heart, all along the last week.

Avraham was stressed and could hardly hide it. His life Dream and Project is coming to an all important ‘reality check’. No one seriously believed a second opportunity might be given, if a sounding failure happens. He understood the principles which should guide us ,but since he was not

a field commander on his own, he had no tools to actually brief us or direct the way I led the preparations. ~~called me in repeatedly during the early weeks of September, and had me run through every detail with him~~. around a weekbefore the operation he called me to his office and asked whether we still have a full rehearsal on our schedule? I answered we have last one tomorrow night

far in the Negev. He seemed happy. ~~He even arranged for us do a full run-through. It was a far-from-realistic simulation. There were no Syrian troops, or mines. We held it in the Negev, on totally different terrain from the Golan. Still, for one reason alone, it was worth doing:~~ H~~h~~**e** wants MHZ to join. He **convinced Meir Har-Zion to attend. Not only was Meir a veteran of** many ~~countless~~

freelance crossings and military raids **into Syria. He had led** 7-8 years ago,in 54’-55’, very close to the place we are heading to,**the series of *successful* Israeli** intelligence **operations** ~~on the Golan~~ **before the mission that went so horribly wrong.**

I said:”yes, Of course”.

MHZ ~~Avraham~~ **said nothing during the entire run-through.** His larynx never recovered. It

was hard for him to talk. on the way back he told me in his cracked voice “it was good”. seemingly not impressed. I did not respond. ~~. Nor did Meir.~~

But when we reached our base, early morning, Avraham was already waiting us. ~~after we’d finished, the two of them called me over.~~

“Well?” Avraham asked Meir.

“They don’t need me, for anything**” he replied. “They**

know what they're doing." It was a ~~hugely~~ genuine**ly** reassuring vote of ~~support~~ confidence **for me**. ~~and the team.~~ **It was also a huge relief for Avraham.**

I had inherited the core of my four-man team from Tubul: two young Sephardim with different backgrounds, different skills, but a shared fluency in Arabic. Motti Nagar was born in Cairo, where he had

a comfortable upbringing. He spoke not only Arabic, but French. He emigrated to Israel in the mid-1950s. He was short, but he was built like a fire (?)hydrant, and was utterly unflappable. He –later went on to work for the Mossad_ operational unit. Kuti Sharabi grew up in a distinguished Yemeni family in an impoverished neighborhood in south Tel Aviv. He had a_

healthy, sometimes self-depreciating sense of humor, **a quick mind, and sometimes an even quicker tongue, but an extraordinary ability to focus on the task at hand once an operation began. The third member of Tubul’s team was a kibbutznik. His name was Moshe** Elimelech. **Moshiko, and he brought two very different qualities to the mission. One of them was going to be**

indispensable: his almost squirrel-like ability to climb trees. Or, in this case, telephone poles. The other, of which I was more (?)leery, was a total, deeply irrational, absence of any sense of fear. It was an asset, to be operational- proven, once and again. ~~maybe, on the battlefield. But not necessarily if we were faced with the split-second need to~~

~~choose fight or flight on the Golan.~~

The fourth and final member of my team was my deputy: the role I'd played alongside Tubul on the provingdry **run into Lebanon. I chose someone who had arrived in the sayeret while I was at officers' school. His name was Avi Telem. He was steady. He was smart.** ~~Most importantly,~~ **like Tubul, he had served in the Golani**

Brigade, so he had first-hand experience of the terrain along the border we were about to cross.

Two days before we were due to set off, Avraham arranged for me to be taken on a reconnaissance flight, in a civilian Piper Cub, along our side of the border. The pilot was under orders not to wander close ~~in~~to Syrian airspace, so we climbed high enough to see

the whole path from some two miles from the border. It gave me a good general perspective of the area around and the path. But not usefull at a short flight to actually collect information. ~~there wasn’t much to see beyond the plateau where we were going to start our infiltration.~~ **I could see no sign of troop**s or **patrols. Nor did I spot evidence of the nearly unbroken**

line of mines marked on the Israeli intelligence~~army~~ map. Still, that didn't mean they weren't there. I did manage to identify a web of what appeared to be well-trodden footpaths leading in from the edge of the plateau. I decided we'd try to use one of them, on the assumption they were less likely to be mined.

The night before we left for the north, Avraham got a phone

call from the chief-of-staff himself. Tzvi Tzur wanted to see me the next morning, for a personal briefing on the operation. I tried to get Avraham to say no. I pointed out that if we didn't get underway by ten o'clock at the latest, we would risk throwing everything off schedule. After some back-and-forth with Tzur's office, it was agreed I would meet him at 9 am, at a gas

station near Herzliya, north of Tel Aviv, and join him for the 20-minute drive along the coastal road **to Netanya, where he had an engagement.** I met for five minutes with Avraham before leaving to the meeting with the Ramatkal. He told me : “ We are starting right now an extremely critical 24 hours for The Unit, for our Intelligence Corps, in fact to Zahal. I don’t know what might happen.

No one does. Remember just these two points: First, Out there, in the field, YOU ARE the RAMATKAL.(Atta HaRamatkal BaShetakh). Second, this mission HAS to be ACCOMPLISHED.” I smiled at him, sort of, and just said: “understood”. And then left to Herzlia. By now the operation even got a formal name, as all operations do. it was “Operation Har” literally means

‘Operation Mountain’. In our codes, when it was decided upon, the name was an homage to Meir HAR Zion. “Har” was his nickname among his fighters and commanders when ***he*** was leading them.

To my surprise, the real Ramatkal, Lt. Gen. Zur, ~~he~~ **drove himself. I settled into the passenger’s seat. Though Tzur had been a battalion commander in the 1948 war, his main**

strength, and main focus as chief-of-staff, was strategic. He was not viewed as a tactical details man. Still, before we set off, he asked me to unfold the map I'd brought with me and talk him through, step by step, how we planned to proceed.

Yet the more we talked, the more I sensed that the details weren't what he really wanted to know. Given the legacy of 1954, he was, understandably,

worried. I think what he actually wanted to gauge was whether *I* felt confident in our preparations. He wanted to reassure himself he wasn’t taking any more than the obvious risks in sending us into Syria. Fortunately, he didn’t ask me outright. If he had, I would have told him that, yes, I believed that we were prepared. I felt we had every chance of succeeding. But

there was no way of being absolutely sure. Still, he must have got what he wanted, because when we drew up to a second gas station, on the edge of Netanya, he shook my hand, wished me luck, and went on his way.

The rest of the team had arrived in Netanya a few minutes before us. Two teams, in fact: my own group of four, with whom I'd be crossing the

border in less than 10 hours' time, and our *C~~s~~hilutz/Hillutz,* **or back-up, team. A** *H~~-shi~~llutz* **was always a part of sayeret** operational **procedure**~~, even when we'd just been doing exercises~~**. The back-up group would remain on the Israeli side of the border. If we got into trouble, they'd come in after us.** We were coordinated, and usually ran live fire exercises together to go

through several probable fighting scenarios.

We still had one last stop to make: at the headquarters of the army's northern command, in Nazareth. It was housed in a Tegart fortress, like the one we'd been held in during our ~~mock~~ "capture, prison and interrogation exercise" a year earlier, with four ccorner ~~a series of~~ watchtowers along its thick outer walls. The new

northern commander, recently moved from the southern command, was an almost equally forbidding figure. Avraham Yoffe had served in the British artillery (?)corps in the Second World War. He commanded (? CHECK?)the Golani Brigade in 1948. Physically imposing, he used to joke with other senior officers that while *they* looked like a bunch of kids, he was

the only one with the true bearing of a general.

He must have been busy when we arrived, because we ended up hanging around in the outer courtyard of the fort for nearly 20 minutes. Just off to the side of the main entry door was a beautifully polished jeep. It had a padlocked metal grill on the back that held two jerrycans of gasoline. Yori Cohen, the commander of the

back-up team, and I both spotted the fuel containers at the same time. We couldn’t help smiling. Yes, we were finally about to embark on our first real operation. But we were still the old Sayeret Matkal, and we were still chronically short of gasoline. As Yori stood guard and provided cover, I picked the lock on the grill and removed all the jerrycans,

one for each of our trucks, and closed it up again.

After briefing General Yaffe, we headed north to our setting-off point. He then joined Avraham Arnan and Meir Amit's intelligence deputy, Ahrileh Yariv, in the command post for our mission, which was in Misgav Am, a kibbutz on the highest mountain on the Israeli sid, about 710 miles back from the Golan.

The sun set at around seven o’clock~~six **o’clock**~~**, but we wanted to wait for full darkness. So it was nearer to** eight~~nine~~ **when we** start to walk and some twenty minutes later – **finally crossed the border. I led the way, with** Motti Nagar, ~~Moshe~~ **Moshiko**,~~, Motti Nagar,~~ **Kuti Sharabi and, finally, Avi Telem behind.** ~~Unlike the dry run into Lebanon, where we’d worn civilian clothes, we were~~

~~in Israeli camouflage uniform. The reasoning was that if we did get intercepted, the Syrians would have to treat us as captured soldiers, according to the rules of prisoners of war – though that obviously hadn't made a difference with Uri Ilan's group eight years earlier. We did not, however, intend to be captured. In addition to our bulging backpacks, containing the~~

~~bugging devices and other assorted equipment, each of us had an Uzi. If we did run into Syrian troops, we would be following Unit 101 rules: don't ask, or answer, questions. Fire.~~ [EB.We did not need the rules of 101 at this stage . we already shaped ours.EB.]

We had Uzis with five magazines each. We had two handgrenades each. Myself and Avi had Binoculars, mine big

and heavy but provided somewhat better capacity to see into the full darkness. We had back packs with the isolators and all other operation related equipment. We would do whatever possible to avoid being exposed, that will mean probably the end of the dream, or walking into an ambush which might be even worse. We knew well, if fire opened, or even a call by an ambush ‘Who is this?

Raise your hands’ the answer will be immediate sprut of fire from our weapons followed immediately by a charge on the ambush or patrol.

The winding ascent onto the plateau wasn’t too tough. We’d endured much worse in training. And when we got to the top, there was no obvious sign of any Syrians._—Still, we had to take things slowly. The moonless night had the

advantage of making us more difficult to spot. But it worked the other way, too. There were no night-vision goggles back then. I did have a pair of binoculars, but they weren’t much use. They just let me see a bit further, probably thirty yards **onto the murky, featureless landscape ahead.** Dry vegetation some 2’ high were all around, and basalt stones and small boulders, which we

couldn’t see, on the ground became unseen obstacle for normal walking. Our movement, crashing the dry vegetation, made a noise which could easily be heard beyond the 30 yards of our depth of effective sight. I didn’t like the noisy result and ordered the rest of the guys to let me be some 20 yards ahead. I will make less noise. They had just to follow me. Stop, crouch or move , when I

do. **My immediate concern was mines** and potential ambushes. **Moving very slowly, however, I did soon manage to locate one of the footworn paths I had spotted from the Piper Cub.**

Walking on it raises significantly your chance of walking into an ambush, that the places ambushes are set. Moving out of the trail through the heavy dry vegetation increase the chance of walking

on a mine, or not observing the remnants of an old or worn barbed wire, which should supposedly warn you of them.

I decided to walk most the way across the plateau in the dry vegetation and use the trails only in the highest probability strip of the mine fields. On that trail we had to move even more carefully in order to be the first to

identify an ambush if it is there.

I had been slightly nervous on the climb up, not so much because I expected trouble but because there was no way of knowing *what* to expect. But the nerves were gone now. I was focused on the next minute ~~few seconds~~, the next 30 yards~~few feet~~, ahead of us.

~~I also found myself recalling~~ [EB. Should be quoted. But somewhere else. when im first time under fire with soldiers or in Six days war.EB.]

something Meir Har-Zion told me after I joined the sayeret, about the first time he had been under fire. He'd been scared, he told me. *Everyone* was scared. But he had also been in command, and he

realized that if *he* didn’t hide any fears and press ahead, there was no way anyone in his right mind was going to follow him.[EB.]

We made it across the plateau safely. But then, almost immediately, we faced trouble. The route I~~we~~’d chosen ~~towards the southern edge of the Syrian military base~~ required us anyway to cross the

Banias River, one of the three upper tributaries of the Jordan. The summer months had been dry. We tried to rich a shallow ford-pass which had even a name on the map. **The crunch of the leaves underfoot had already prompted me to tell the others to take things more slowly as we descended into the gorge. But the river was higher, and in much fuller flow, than we had expected.**

After spending a good ~~20 or~~ **30 minutes scouting the bank,** more than 150 yards on each direction for the ford-pass, which we couldn't find –**we settled on what appeared to be the shallowest**/slowest streaming **part. Yet even there, it was not exactly** [EB.what do you mean by this sentence? EB.] **a stream.** I felt in my head the alarm of a major mistake, and a problem ahead. We did not

predict such a strong stream.**In** ~~all~~ **our training, we had never practiced this kind of crossing.**And did not bring serious equipment for this purpose. **The only** ~~remotely~~ **useful piece of equipment I could find in our backpacks was two 25-foot lengths of parachute wire** we always had with us.**. It was strong, but also hard to grip without cutting your hands. We spliced**

the two stretches of wire together. I took the lead end and waded across the river. Very quickly, I sunk up to above my chest, but, fighting the flow, managed to get to the other side. Then, with Avi Telem on the other bank holding his end of the wire, the three others used it to help them cross, managing to stay at least a bit drier. Crucially, they also kept the intercept

equipment dry. Then, Avi followed.

Both he and I were now soaking wet. We were also well behind schedule. It was after **midnight, and we had covered less than half of our three-mile route to the telephone poles behind the Syrian base. We were under explicit** operational **orders** regarding the time-line, a routine sop in any such operation, Thus, in

such operations, where whatever you've accomplished was in vain, if you had been exposed even AFTER you completed the mission, let's say on your way back, because you had to hurry or because approaching sunrise made you exposed. There is always a pre-set "last Time" by which, even if you had not completed a mission you have to turn back and go home. In our case the hour, carefully

calculated, then reiterated at all briefings was 115am. ~~from both Meir Amit and Avraham that, whatever happened, we were to turn back to Israel by 1:15 in the morning.~~ **Barely an hour away. The last thing** everyone~~they~~ **wanted was for us to be still in Syria when daylight broke.**

We began climbing into the heart of the Golan Heights, planning to bypass not too

close, ~~toward~~ **the southern edge of the Syrian army base. The path got steeper and rockier as we went. Within 10 minutes or so,** and the noise of the now,more scatterred dry vegetation,but louder noise of the collapsing slivers of stones under our feet ~~we found ourselves in a wooded area, with a thick covering of dry leaves. We were still some distance from the army camp.~~

~~But we were making a fair amount of noise, so I got the others to follow me at a distance of 40 or 50 feet as we made our way nearer to the fort~~. The camp came closer. You could vaguely notice its skyline **It wasn’t a huge installation. But it was** about one quarter ~~nearly~~ **the size of Mishmar Hasharon, with several** buildings, several **hundred troops. It** was surrounded by

trenches and several heavily fortified uotposts, slightly elevated over ground level~~sat behind an inner wall and a long~~, **indifferently maintained, barbed-wire fence on the perimeter. For a half-hour or so, we moved forward in a kind of rubber-band formation. I would advance, crouching, as quietly as I could, 50 feet at a time. I would then**– listen, one knee on the ground~~lie down~~,

scan the area ahead with my binoculars for any obvious danger, and wave the others to follow. It was slow going. But better than the alternative.

Then, as I prepared to move forward again, I felt a tug on my shoulder. It was Moshiko. “Ehud,” he said. “We’ve got to move faster. We won’t get there in time.” I told him “ I’ve heard you.~~not to worry. “~~Wait here, till the others catch up

with you, and don’t do it again. My intention was to avoid hitting the outer fence of the camp. ~~. As long as we stay quiet, we’ll be fine.”~~ **Still, whether through impatience or growing confidence, by the time the outer fence of the camp finally came into view,** some thirty yards to the north of us **the gap between me and the others**

had narrowed. They were now just 10 or 15 feet behind me.

It was then that I suddenly heard the sound of movement ahead of us.

I motioned for the others to get down. At first, I thought it was an animaln ~~animal~~. The Golan was known for its wild boars. But as I crouched~~stood~~ absolutely still, looking around, I noticed, 2~~3~~0 feet in front of us,a little bit to the

right, outside the fence and the whole compound, three ~~a group of five~~ **Syrian soldiers. They were lying on a bit of rocky scrubland** higher than us.~~by the edge of~~ some 40 yards out of **the fence.** Covered with light cots.~~And~~ **they were fast**(?) **asleep** one of them snoring quietly. ~~Or at least they seemed to be.~~ **I maneuvered my Uzi into firing position, just in case. We waited, for a**

minute. Then two. By which time, it was clear they really were sleeping.

Then, from directly behind me, another sound.

It was the loud hiss of Avi's new two-wayy radio, ~~followed by two or three clipped sentences, in Hebrew.~~ We were using an early Motorola, which looked like an old lady's thick hand bag and did not have ~~without~~ the

squelch button on later models, so there was no way to mute the sound. I was ~~concerned~~ worried we'd end up waking the Syrians. [EB. To be considered. Not reaaly true here. Lets find later placesEB.]In fact, I was not just worried, but scared. As Meir had said to me about his first live operation, who wouldn't be? But I can also truthfully say that the fear – a slight, sudden, tightening in

the chest – had come and gone, almost like a shudder, by the time Avi drew up beside me.)EB.]

“Ehud,” he whispered. “It’s 1:15. The command post ordered~~y told me~~ **we have to turn back.”**

“Turn off the radio,” I replied, my hand on his elbow, reassuringly I hoped, as I shepherded him and the others back a full 100 feet or so from the sleeping Syrians. “Turn the

radio off," I said once we were at a safe distance. ~~"We can call them later. ***Yihyeh beseder*****," I added, just loud enough so the rest of the team could hear. "It'll be fine."~~

We took a wider arc around the camp. We began to move more quickly for the final mile to the road that led toward Mas'ade and then **Quneitra. Given the** (?)**somnolence of the sentries, I felt** its low chance

~~pretty confident~~ **we would**~~n’t~~ **encounter another Syrian** ambush~~patrol.~~**. ~~While I knew I might find myself in trouble for not returning to Israel as ordered,~~ I was** quite~~also~~ **certain we’d have an easier, and faster, return trip. After all, I knew what had held us up on the way in: finding a path on the plateau that was clear of mines, locating a place to cross the swollen river, and a**

general unfamiliarity of the terrain. None of those would apply now.I knew that if I'll move on exactly the same path I did till now, I won't have neither mines no Ambushes. Its last part of the night. We will be able to move much faster, yet relatively secured. **I figured we could get the job done and still be back before dawn. But I**t was completely impractical ~~wasn't going to~~

~~waste time~~ **radioing back in order to make, and very possibly lose, that argument with the command post.**

As we got closer to the Banias-Mas’ade ~~Quneitra~~ **road, Avi asked me a couple of more times whether he should turn the radio back on. “**I’ll tell you when to do”~~Don’t worry,~~**” I said.** ~~“They’ll just assume we’re on our way back.”~~

It was nearly two in the morning when we reached the road. We found a telephone pole set a bit back, on the edge of a field. Avi ~~and I~~ acted as a single lookout~~s~~. Moshik swiftly climbed. Came down after a minute or two and~~We~~ selected the intercept device that seemed the most similar to the real Syrian isolator. ~~Moshe~~ Moshiko climbed again onto the shoulder of Kuti Sharabi, who

double-checked the device to make sure it was in order. Moshikoe then scampered up the pole, installed it, and brought back the original Syrian unit. The entire operation took less than 10 minutes.

As I'd anticipated, Wwe moved more quickly on the way back. By shortly after 3:3015 we had recrossed the river. "You can turn on the radio now," I told Avi. When he'd done so, he

handed it to me. I wanted to hear the response and probably deduce some feeling of what happened at the CP. I reported the code word for our present place. And than added the code word for “mission accomplished” adding “60 small ones, ago”. I could feel the sigh of relief. ~~Meir Amit had evidently joined his deputy in the command post during the night, and he was the one who answered. “We’re on~~

~~our way back," I told him. "Mission accomplished."~~

By the time we had crossed the plateau and begun climbing back down toward Israel, it was starting to get light. I assumed we were near enough to the border to make it unlikely we'd be shot at. Still, there was always the risk we'd be seen from the Heights, so I was relieved when we finally reached the long makeshift

mound of boulders, some ten feet high, **that passed for a**nti Tank ~~shrapnel~~ **barrier on the** middle of the fields **of**~~outskirts of~~ **Kibbutz Dan. As soon as we had stepped safely behind it, I saw that Meir, and Avraham too, were waiting for us. Meir shook my hand, beaming. Avraham grabbed each of us, one by one, in a bear hug.**

Then, drawing me aside, Avraham said that, while this really didn't *matter* in the great scheme of things, I had only narrowly missed landing myself in very deep trouble. I assumed my transgression was shutting down the radio, and disobeying the order to return. But it turned out that Ahra~~i~~~~e~~leh Yariv had fought that battle with General Yoffe back in the command post, and since

both had nothing to do about it by then, he practically had won. “The commander of the ~~Sayeret Matkal~~ force in the field~~unit~~ is the only one who can judge what’s happening,” he’d told the general when the radio went dead. General Yoffe obviously suspected we’d turned it off. “We have to leave it to him,” Ahra~~i~~~~e~~leh told him. “He is the *ramat-kal ba Se~~-~~~~she~~chtach*.” The chief-of-staff

on the ground. Resonating Avraham convictions which Avraham did not have the stature to carry-on facing Yoffe.

Yet the real battle with General Yoffe was about something else entirely, and it had required all of Meir Amit's own powers of persuasion to defuse it: Yoffe had discovered that his jerrycans of gasoline had gone from his uniquely

equipped “hunting jeep”. He was really a devoted hunter, and later served as the Head of National Parks Authority in Israel. **And he had insisted that if and when I returned safely from the Golan Heights, I be handed over to the military police.**

I don’t know what I would have told the general if he’d asked me directly whether I had broken into his jeep. But in

> the mix of celebration and simple relief that the Syrian operation had succeeded, I got away with what amounted to a plea-bargain.

> I promised both Meir Amit and Avraham – at least one of whom believed me – that it would never happen again.